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INTERSECTING EXPERIENCES: CLASS, GENDER, ETHNICITY AND RACE IN THE LIVES OF HIGHLY SKILLED MIGRANTS IN FINLAND

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Abstract



The aim of this article is to study the experiences of highly skilled migrants from an intersectional perspective. Based on a case study of a group of skilled migrants in Finland, this article explores the interplay of various social identities and categorizations in their everyday life. I argue that although class markers are an important element in the self-defined group identification for skilled migrants, they are also subjected to intersecting social categorizations, stereotyping and assumptions based on gender, ethnicity, race and nationality, creating different experiences and belongings for different skilled migrants. Anthias' concept of 'translocational positionality' is used to highlight how these intersections are highly situational, context specific and relative to other actors in the Finnish context.

Keywords

categorization • ethnicity • intersectionality • highly skilled migrants • social identities

Introduction

Academic research, similar to popular imagination, has largely depicted an image of highly skilled migrants as white male professionals, 'who shuttle from one work assignment or country to another, part of an international upper class that is not bound by familial relationships or national borders' (Leinonen 2011: 8). They are assumed to have it easy as immigrants because of their high educational and employment status, and they are seen to add wanted multicultural flavour and expected not to experience problems with fitting in (Koskela 2014; Leinonen 2011). However, it is often overlooked that this group is much

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more heterogeneous (Kyhä 2011: 35-7). Not all skilled migrants are white and/or come from Western countries; many come from countries with negatively viewed nationalities or have racialised ethnicities (Sutela & Larja 2015). They are certainly not all male either and may be accompanied by dependents (Coles & Fechter 2008). When discussing highly skilled migrants, Fechter (2007: 45) notes that 'While such groups maintain strong boundaries towards the outside, they are also intersected by multiple internal boundaries, especially those of gender, ethnicity and class'. Indeed, the only characteristics that highly skilled migrants share are their high socio-economic class status, and the fact that they come from countries outside their place of residence.

In this article, I use an intersectional approach to explain how social categorizations such as class, ethnicity, nationality and gender affect the everyday lived experiences of skilled migrants in Finland. Advancing from the determinism of early intersectionality that saw gender, race and class constitutive of each other (see e.g. Anthias 2009 for discussion), I argue that different intersectionalities among the highly skilled migrants in Finland are highly situational, context specific and relative to other actors. It is not that a particular ethnicity or race, class position or gender (or any combination of them) carries an inherently negative meaning within it. Rather, in certain situations, certain social categories may be positive markers, and in others, these same categories are viewed negatively. This research shows that although skilled migrants share a sense of belonging to each other, they are subjected to various social categorizations that influence the multitude of different experiences of being a skilled migrant in Finland.

I will start by introducing the theoretical premise of intersectionality, as well as the existing research context of intersectionality and skilled migration in the Nordic region. I will then present my findings first on how class status is linked to skilled migrants' group identity and second on how gender becomes important specifically through its intersections with class and ethnicity, rather than on its own. Finally, the discussion will describe the role of ethnicity and race, not only as dominant categorizations but also as constraints in the lives of skilled migrants from non-Western countries.

Intersecting experiences

The intersectional approach draws attention to the importance of individual experiences that transcend social categorizations such as nationality, gender or race as stand-alone identifications. As stated by Yuval-Davis (2007: 565), 'There is no meaning to the notion of "black", for instance, which is not gendered and classed, no meaning for the notion of "woman", which is not ethnicized and classed, etc.'. In other words, 'traditional' social divisions of people by, for example, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality or age cannot be taken to account for an individual's experiences alone. Furthermore, identities are social constructions set within specific frames of reference of the particular societal context. Within this context they are defined by 'boundaries on the one hand and hierarchies on the other' and are hence 'situational, temporal and subject to different meanings and inflections', (Anthias 2008: 15).

To examine these contextual aspects of social identifications, I utilise Anthias' (2008, 2009, 2012, 2013a) idea of 'translocational' positionality, which concentrates on both social and structural aspects of identities, rather than just cumulative effects of categorizations: 'The notion of translocation references the idea of "location" as a social space which is produced within contextual, spatial, temporal and hierarchical relations around the "intersections" of social divisions and identities of class, ethnicity and gender (amongst others)' (Anthias 2008: 9). In short, each categorization has a different 'position' and meaning not only in combination with others but also in relation to the 'locations', or structures, within which they are valued. Social categorizations lose meaning in some circumstances and, reversely, are more salient in others (ibid). Structural variations of Finland as the 'location' are constructed by a non-colonial history, centrality of whiteness, rhetoric of gender equality and an ethos of Nordic welfare state (Tuori *et al.* 2009) and in a more general sense by global power relations and exchanges of capital that favour white Western migrants (Lundström 2017). Furthermore, most migrants hold connections to several locations concurrently (e.g. to home and host country) and hence occupy simultaneous (often contradictory) social locations ranging from the local to the transnational level (Mahler, Chaudhuri & Patil 2015). All of these will affect the value, or positivity/negativity, of any particular social 'position' or categorization. Therefore, merely being a skilled migrant may not always provide the positive valorisation that is assumed: 'a migrant's social status depends not only on his or her education and profession (as is usually assumed in studies on elite migrants) but also on hierarchies based on nationality, race, ethnicity, and language in each receiving country' (Leinonen 2012b: 249). Value judgements attached to these hierarchies mean that not all skilled migrants of any nationality, ethnicity and gender will be valued the same by their host society.

Intersections of social categories in the study of highly skilled migrants in the Nordic region

In the field of migration research in Finland, skilled migrants began to appear in the early 2000s after the rise of IT technologies that started to attract skilled foreign workers into the country. Today, about 40% of people with foreign origin between the ages of 25 and 54 years in Finland have higher education degrees (Nieminen, Sutela & Hannula 2015: 31-32). This number is slightly higher in the greater Helsinki region (45%) and among foreign nationals of Western countries (58%), 22% of these degrees are in the technical field (ibid: 38).

Research on skilled migration has been more focused on economic consideration and multiculturalism of the workplace than social adaptation or individual experiences (see Koskela 2010 for more information). The heterogeneity of social identities and the multitude of experiences within the skilled migrants category do not show up in these types of studies (Fechter & Walsh 2012). For example, skilled migrants who come from countries outside the Western world are subjected to racialised discourses in very different ways than white Western migrants. In addition, female skilled migrants may have different experiences

than male skilled migrants. Still, in research, 'Women usually appear only as dependents who follow their husbands abroad and take care of the household while their husbands are working (the so-called "trailing wife effect").[...] Those researchers who have employed a gendered family or household analysis of migration networks have focused on unskilled migrants' (Leinonen 2011: 126). In 2008, Coles & Fechter's book about female transnational professionals mentioned 'single female professionals' as lead migrants as possible 'future trends' (2008: 1). Most female migrants discussed in the book were still 'accompanying spouses' (ibid).

However, within the last decade, studies of skilled migrants with respect to the variations in gender, class, ethnicity and/or race have started to emerge. They give us some insights into the individualised experiences of different types of skilled migrants in the Nordics. Merimaa & Oilinki's (2010) study of Indian and Chinese professionals and Yijälä & Nyman's (2017) research on skilled Iraqi asylum seekers bring to focus the role of ethnicity for skilled migrants in Finland. Mozetic (2018) discusses non-European doctors who arrived to Sweden as refugees, looking at the intersection of their professional and refugee identities. Also in the context of Sweden, Salmonssen & Mella (2013) discuss doctors with immigrant background and how understandings of skills, trust and professionalism are linked to racialised views of immigrants from different countries. Similar issues have been dealt with by Haukilahti, Virjo & Mattila (2012) in Finland among doctors from outside the European economic area.

Difficulties in finding high prestige jobs by Pakistani skilled migrants in Finland have been noted by Ahmad (2015). Liebkind, Larja & Brylka's (2016) experimental study also shows evidence of the (negative) impact of ethnic hierarchies in recruitment of dentists. Valenta (2008) has studied the intersections of class and ethnicity among skilled migrants in Norway suffering from occupational displacement and devaluation. Non-Western skilled migrants facing deskilling or de-credentialisation are also discussed by Brodmann & Polavieja (2011) in Denmark. North African skilled migrants and their personal motivations for staying in several Nordic countries are discussed by Sabour & Habti (2010).

Studies specifically of female skilled migrants have also started to emerge. Chang (2014) looks at the intersections of gender with race and ethnicity in her study about Taiwanese university-educated women in Finland. Both Habti's (2014) study of skilled female Arab migrants and Lahti's (2013) research on Russian female professionals in Finland point to the importance of cultural and ethnic background in gendered experiences. Conversely to the ethnicised gender of these studies, Clarke (2014) has looked at how American female migrants discuss their gendered and privileged migrant identities in Finland, and Lulle & Balode (2014) discuss 'hierarchies within whiteness' in relation to Latvian skilled female migrants in Finland. Similarly, Guðjónsdóttir & Loftsdóttir (2017) look at how race, nationality and class intersect in the notion of belonging among Icelandics in Norway.

Building on the premise that more studies taking social categorizations such as gender, ethnicity and race into consideration are needed in the field of skilled migration research, this article presents varying experiences of intersecting identities as shown by my own research data. This research shows that although skilled migrants share a sense

of belonging to each other, social categorizations intersecting within this group create a variety of different experiences of being a skilled migrant in Finland. The narratives of the skilled migrants bring forth these individual experiences of lived everyday life in ways that highlight the heterogeneity of those who count themselves as part of the skilled migrant group.

Methods and data

This article is based on the analysis of qualitative data from a case study of skilled migrants living in Helsinki, using a narrative approach. The data were primarily gathered from intermittent ethnographic fieldwork between the years of 2008 and 2012 by participant observation of the activities of several different multicultural social associations in Helsinki frequented by skilled migrants. These associations are all open membership social organisations with different levels of formality and structure. Their activities focus on free time outside work, rather than networking for business contacts. What they have in common is that their members tend to be those referred to as ‘expats’ or skilled migrants.

Typically, they have higher-level degrees and/or comparable work experience from various fields of business, technology, finance, education and so on. However, no strict definition of what constitutes a ‘skilled migrant’ was used, rather those who would refer to themselves as such were considered part of the field. The social associations also attract internationally minded Finns as their members and as such provide an informal setting in which to observe interaction between members of the host society and skilled migrants.

These ethnographic data have been expanded on with informal interviews during fieldwork and subsequent in-depth, one-on-one interviews. The in-depth interviews include 15 informants I met during my fieldwork, chosen to represent the variation of gender, nationalities and professional fields that naturally occur in the skilled migrant group in Finland. They were between the ages of 23 and 43 years from 14 different nationalities (several of them dual nationalities and/or of minority ethnic heritage), 13 different occupations and a gender ratio of nine males to six females. They had been in the country between 1 and 12 years. All but one male were employed in their own professional fields at the time of the interviews. The interviews were conducted in a social setting in a café and were only loosely structured, leaving room for naturally occurring topics of conversation. Questions for the interviews were derived from recurring and central themes coming forth during fieldwork. The interviewees were asked about their experiences of living in Finland and how they feel they are perceived in their everyday life outside the workplace. However, the variation and number of informants encountered during fieldwork are much greater, and some of the materials quoted in this article are from unstructured ethnographic interviews conducted during fieldwork. Both the interviews and the ethnographic field notes were transcribed and then coded with the help of Atlas software.

Class, gender, ethnicity and race in the lives of highly skilled migrants

I will next present findings from my data. This section is divided into three themed discussions on class, gender and race and ethnicity. These are topics that come up in both the interviews and the ethnographic data. They are also prevalent social categorizations that affect the ways the skilled migrants feel they are perceived in the context of their everyday lives in Finland.

Intersecting class: on the formation of ‘us’ and the misguidance of perception

Much of research on immigrant social identities centres around ethnic identities as the given, de facto, collective identification for people who have migrated to another country. This ‘ethnic lens’ in research assumes that migrants’ activities are based on ethnic and national categories of identity (Glick Schiller, Darieva & Gruner-Domic 2011), and that ethnic identity is the primary social identification for immigrants, and hence the basis for their communal organisation. However, skilled migrants primarily form multi-ethnic groups that have a sense of solidarity not tied to ethnic or national background (Fechter & Walsh 2012; Koskela 2014). Skilled migrants’ feeling of connectedness can also be based simply on being from outside Finland, as can be seen from these quotes from my interviewees:

Yeah, I mean because the only thing we have in common is that we all speak English and that we’re all here.[...]Yeah, and we’re all not Finns! (USA, education, female. 6 years in Finland)

Because when a foreign person meet a foreign person, the first thing that comes to mind is that we’re all foreigners. The question is why is he here. (Kenya, IT, male. 9 years in Finland)

By ‘why is he here’, this interviewee is referring to the ‘type’ of immigrant, namely working, economic migrant versus humanitarian migrants. Class status is also an important determinant of group identification for the skilled migrants, because a shared socio-economic class with its associated earning level, as well as educational and employment status, makes them different from other types of migrants (see also Valenta 2008). In the framework of Finland, this differentiation is made by both the Finns and the skilled migrants themselves by describing themselves as ‘foreigners’, as opposed to ‘immigrants’ (Koskela 2014; Leinonen 2012a, see also Mozetic 2018 in Sweden). In this comparison, being a skilled migrant is a positive socio-economic class identity in general, as well as a more positive identity than being perceived as ‘immigrant’, a heavily racialised categorization in all of the Nordic countries (Guðjónsdóttir & Loftsdóttir 2017).

However, it is not class in a purely economic sense that is used as the basis for group identification. An understanding of class as both social and economic should include

consideration for shared subjectivities and practises and even access to social and cultural capital in a Bourdieuan sense (Fresnoza-Flot & Shinozaki 2017). As such, this class-based recognition of similarity is tied to living the same (admittedly class-dependent) lifestyle, the cultural component of which is often referred to with terms such as ‘culture of global economy’ (Raunio 2002), ‘expat bubble’ (e.g. Fechter 2007) or what Glick Schiller, Darieva & Gruner-Domic (2011) have referred to as ‘cosmopolitan sociability’, a class-based lifestyle identity that can be claimed ‘as a way of stepping beyond ethnic identifications and boundaries without discarding them completely’ (2011: 413).

Class is also present in the skilled migrants’ lives as an imposed social categorization by which they are valued by their host society, the Finns. Studies have shown that Finns are most positive towards those immigrants who are willing to follow cultural values of the host society and have good educational qualifications and relevant occupational skills (Bail 2008: 49; also Jaakkola 2009). However, my findings show that in the context of everyday life outside the workplace, skilled migrants’ experiences of being judged according to somatic features play a bigger role than their class status (Koskela 2014). Indeed, ethnic categorizations often ‘contradict the effects of middle-classness’ (Anthias 2013b: 17). Especially, *the perception* of class is greatly influenced by stereotypes about different ethnicities. By perception of class, I mean what the larger society/the viewer assumes about the class status of the immigrant, often based on their racialised somatic features (Fechter & Walsh 2012; Keskinen *et al.* 2018: 79). For example, Mozetic (2018) discusses this in relation to doctors with refugee background in Sweden who felt that they were usually perceived as ‘just’ refugees. This is a labelling that ‘rattles their doctor-identity’ (ibid: 250) as it does not fit their class understanding of themselves as professional, highly qualified, working people. Indeed, class in itself is already an ethnicised and gendered notion, which is partially the reason we also presuppose skilled migrants to be white and male, and conversely that all white Western migrants are skilled migrants (Fechter & Walsh 2012). In this sense, *both* self-defined identities and assumed and imposed social categorizations intersect (Jenkins 2000) within the skilled migrant group creating different experiences of being a skilled migrant for different skilled migrants at different times and places.

Intersecting gender: on love, dating and the sexualised ethnic female

Most of my interviewees rarely refer to gender, and in my fieldwork gender came up mainly in relation to cultural differences and dating. Based on my data then, gender as a stand-alone category does not appear as a central concern in the lives and narratives of the skilled migrants. However, it is through intersections with other categories that the relevance of gender starts to come out.

By sheer virtue of being different to Finns, many skilled migrants become sought after partners in Finland. Especially white male migrants from Western countries remark on how they find dating a lot easier than they did when still living in their home countries. For example, British or American men may find their ‘market value’ greatly increased after

moving to Finland and can turn from feeling like an 'average Joe' to someone that Finnish women find very interesting by sheer virtue of being of a positively viewed nationality or even because of an appealing accent when speaking English. There is an association of the male expat lifestyle being 'just about having a chit chat or hooking up with girls' (India, sales, male. Single). Conversely, skilled migrant women talk about having trouble meeting (Finnish) men and also about not being interested in Finnish men in general (they are seen as shy and introverted, and they drink too much and talk too little). As one of my interviewees put it, 'All the foreign men are always teasing that this is a paradise for foreign men, but for women, foreign women, it's hell!' (USA, education, female. Single).

However, market value at the Finnish dating scene is not just a gendered issue. Ethnicities and nationalities can also intersect with gender to create disadvantaged positions when it comes to dating in Finland:

Well obviously, if you're trying to pick up a girl, it's bad to be an Indian [laughing]! (India, sales, male. 2 years in Finland. Single)

Like if you look at these Chinese ladies or Asian girls, they are quite well taken by this society, you find lots of Finnish guys get a Chinese girlfriend or a wife, or Japanese the same thing, but that doesn't happen to men. If you look around, very seldom you see your [Finnish] lady friend have a Chinese boyfriend. (China, research, male. 4 years in Finland. Single)

Statistics show a convergence to these gendered and ethnicised experiences of the Finns' preference of partners; immigrating to Finland because of a Finnish spouse is highly gendered and intersects with class: most men who migrate to Finland because of a relationship are skilled and from Western countries. Conversely, foreign women who come to Finland because of a relationship are predominantly low skilled and from non-Western countries. Female migrants from these countries are confronted by images of 'sexualised ethnicity' that are not equally applied to male migrants from the same countries (Davydova 2012). Examples of such stigmatised gendered ethnicities in Finland are the stereotype of passive and subservient Filipino and Thai wives (Huttunen 2004; Sirkkilä 2006) or caricaturing Russian women as prostitutes (Davydova 2012). For men, such stigmatised gendered ethnicities are, for example, the image of patriarchal/oppressive Muslim men (Eid 2014). These stereotypes, although predominantly based on the assumption of lower class status and a position of subordination, may also impede on skilled migrants' lives. For example, Chang (2014) found in her study that her Taiwanese skilled female informants felt viewed as ethnicised representatives of their gender, subordinate to their husbands, and that their educational qualifications and professional status were overlooked.

Apart from issues of dating and relationships, gender furthermore comes out in discussion about racism or harassment towards immigrants in general; in my data, there is a notable male gender bias to bringing up instances where they have felt threatened. These can range from racial abuse to hostile accusations of being one of those foreign men who 'come to Finland and steal all the women' (United Kingdom, IT, male). Personal experiences

also include seemingly harmless everyday situations, such as: ‘you can notice sometimes I like sit on the bus, people don’t really want to sit next to [me]’ (Panama, gaming industry, male), or getting different treatment because of skin colour in the bank, police station, restaurant or simply how people look at you on the street (Kenya, IT, male). Female migrants seem to get a gentler reception and do not often recount such experiences. Although studies indicate prejudice especially towards migrants from (sub-Saharan) African nationalities in Finland (e.g. Jaakkola 2009; Keskinen *et al.* 2018), a female skilled migrant from West Africa I interviewed seemed completely oblivious to any negative sentiments in Finland towards black people. She was even surprised to find out that African migrants often have a hard time integrating and that almost half have experienced racism against them (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2017). However, my findings are contradicted by a 2017 survey on discrimination in Finland: women of sub-Saharan African descent actually reported having experienced discrimination more often than men of the same background (48% of women versus 43% of men) (*ibid.*: 30). This can be partially accounted for by women being more likely to report an incident (36% versus 26%) (*ibid.*: 44), and also by the relatively privileged position of my female informants; in comparison with, for example, black African refugee women, their difference in class status and subsequently social circles may mean that they experience less discrimination in their everyday life.

However, it is important to point out again that neither female nor male skilled migrants directly and unpromptedly bring up issues related to gender in their interviews or conversations in general. This is not to say that gender does not matter; sometimes what is left out tells us even more. The relative de-emphasis on gender, especially by skilled migrant women, can be interpreted as a narrative about the importance of class; they can ‘afford’ to *not* make gender an issue because of their class status. I would argue that being a woman is not a centrally defining identity category for skilled female migrants, because both Finland and the multinational social circles (as the two social worlds where they ‘live’) are relatively gender-equal surroundings. This contrasts with the experiences of, for example, an unskilled refugee woman with a visible, racialised ethnicity, who would be subjected to stereotyped gendered ethnicities *as well as* class-based disadvantages, therefore epitomising the ‘triple burden’ of race, gender and class that are seen ‘as additive in producing subordination’ (Anthias 2008: 13). For skilled female migrants, being a foreigner, a highly educated person, and most often a well-paid professional are more important identities and categorizations in this context.

An interesting contrast to my conclusions is found from Yijälä & Nyman’s study (2017) of skilled Iraqi refugees working in Finland. In their data, female skilled migrants of this group still felt the burden of more traditional gender roles in their home life, even if they were treated as equals at the work place. Similar findings have also been made by Habti (2014) among North African female skilled migrants. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge again the importance of both structural ‘location’ and personal ‘position’ (Anthias e.g. 2009, 2012), and the fact that migrants invariably are also affected by their pre-migration lives. ‘Affording’ not to care about gender in the egalitarian context of Finland may not be so strongly pronounced with migrants originating from less gender-equal cultures.

In addition, most skilled female migrants in my data are not mothers. On this issue, Clarke's (2014: 55) interviews with American female migrants in Finland offer some insights into a very different experience as a skilled female migrant: 'For these women living as self-defined foreigners (rather than immigrants) in a country in which they found their aspirations for careers frustrated, children became a central focus of identity and connection. All of the interviewees who had children identified themselves primarily as mothers and then secondly as wives'. Sentiments such as these are not present in my data, assumedly because all the female migrants, including those who are mothers, were employed professionals and therefore also had the benefit of this positive categorization. Clarke's study, however, implies complex intersections between (un)employment, parenthood and gender that may affect female skilled migrants' identities in Finland.

Intersecting race and ethnicity: on visibility, whiteness and the power of assumptions

As already mentioned, one of the most discriminated groups of migrants in Finland are black sub-Saharan Africans (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2017; Jaakkola 2009). Also, in my data, many black skilled migrants remark on feeling that they are automatically assumed to be refugees, more specifically Somali refugees, the most discriminated and pinpointed group of migrants in Finland (Säävälä 2009). Here I asked one such migrant about how they feel they are perceived in Finland:

Refugee. [...] Muslim, Somali Muslim. If I'm drinking beer, then I'm a bad Muslim [laughing]! If I go to a restaurant, they tell me that's pork, because they make an assumption that I'm Muslim, I'm not supposed to eat pork. So they already tell me when I'm going to pick the food 'hey, that's pork'. I eat pork! So there's quite many assumptions made wherever you go. And of course they obviously think that you're poor. That you come from a poor family, probably live in a mud house... yeah. [...] and enjoying all the country's benefits, and having a million babies and a couple of wives [laughing]. That's the usual assumption. (Kenya, IT, male. 9 years in Finland. Christian)

The quote above illustrates how judging a person by skin colour alone can get everything wrong: their nationality, reason for being in Finland, line of work, education and even religious affiliation. Stereotypical assumptions such as these are common complaints among skilled migrants from racialised minorities, especially men. It is also apparent that many feel judged according to racialised somatic features, rather than class-based merit (Mozetic 2018; Salmonssen & Mella 2013). Being a skilled migrant is not something that shows on the outside readily, and the assumption that African and many Asian migrants often come across is that they are humanitarian migrants, possibly refugees, rather than skilled labour migrants:

Yeah, but here the thing is that in Finland you cannot make out [who is a skilled migrant]... there are not so many foreigners here who are really highly educated and working in well-up places so they don't have a... it's really that you belong to this group and we're all foreigners and that they think that I might be also a refugee [laughing]. (India, health care, male. 12 years in Finland)

Both Chinese and Indian are good examples of national groups whose migrants started first arriving in Finland for lower skilled labour (especially ethnic restaurant businesses and cleaning services), but since the IT revolution many migrants coming from these countries are highly skilled individuals (Merimaa & Oilinki 2010). However, stereotypes of ethnic niches still exist:

I think about an experience I had in my neighbourhood, my neighbour look at me and say 'Nokia?', that was the first word from him! But my hairdresser, she was Russian, I think she was originally from Russia, she looked at me and she didn't really say much, but she looked at me and then she said 'food industry?'. That's what she thought about, that's exactly what she said [laughing]! (China, research, male. 4 years in Finland)

This centrality of experiences related to ethnicity, race and nationality is first and foremost about visibility. In everyday life of the migrants, race and ethnicity are strongly defining, even restricting, factors, largely because educational or employment status is not something that readily shows on the outside. Migrants with racialised visibilities are therefore at the mercy of stereotypes and popular images of what particular national/ethnic groups are expected to do professionally in Finland or the reasons why they have come to Finland (e.g. as refugees) every time they step outside of their home or their workplace (which would be the few places where their class/professional status is known to everyone).

However, the idea of visibility is not just about looking different to the majority of Finns. Leinonen (2012a) points out that although immigrants are often visible because of skin colour and other somatic features, they may also be(come) visible in audible terms by not speaking (perfect) Finnish and even at the level of (public) discourse. To these 'immigrant visibilities', one could add being visible because of one's (foreign) name: an Asian informant reported that his assistant at his dental practise has to constantly assure that he is a qualified professional when clients phone in for an appointment and hear his name not being Finnish. Many other studies show similar distrust (e.g. Mozetic 2018; Salmonssen & Mella 2013). Incidents such as these are commonplace in a still relatively homogenous country such as Finland that has not been a major recipient of contemporary migration flows. Indeed, 'Immigrant visibility is thus contingent on specific national and temporal contexts, in which hierarchies based on race, class, nationality, and language intersect to produce different kinds of visibility for different groups of foreigners' (Leinonen 2012a: 214).

Also, the value attached to these different kinds of visibilities may vary. For example, nationality and ethnicity can intersect in ways that 'neutralise' the initial negative valuation based on somatic features:

I've heard them [Finns], [from] my friends you know, think that I'm from Asia, therefore one of those refugees or something like that. But then when they hear my accent they're 'oh, ok!'. So it's totally different. From what they thought. [...] Yeah when they hear I'm from Canada, they're like yeah, a positive reaction comes. (Canadian with Asian ethnic heritage, economics, male. 10 years in Finland)

Apart from the example of Russians, in the Finnish context, white Western migrants could be conversely described as 'invisible' or 'unmarked' (Leinonen & Toivanen 2014: 4). Those who are 'structurally advantaged' (i.e. white, privileged, male) 'are less likely to recognize the existence of a system of stratification' (Sacks and Lindholm 2002: 129). Perhaps not surprisingly, many white skilled migrants seem rather unaware of the importance of (their privileged) ethnicity, rather they think that being highly skilled is enough to be a valued immigrant in Finland, regardless of nationality, race or ethnicity:

To me it looks that there is no discrimination against people, so sense of justice and equality is very developed, well developed here. So [...] I think the Finnish society is asking for a foreigner with a specific profile [for employment], not because his nationality is something, but because this person fulfils all the other requirements. (Greece, administration, female. 3 years in Finland)

Similar to the intersection of class and gender, 'Whiteness can be seen as including certain privileges where individuals can 'afford' to forget their own skin colour and position of power' (Tuori *et al.* 2009). On the contrary, for skilled migrants of unfavourable racialised ethnicities and nationalities in Finland, ethnicity and race are highly relevant factors in social situations: it is by no means enough just to be a highly skilled, employed migrant to be accepted, rather visible racialised markers connected to ethnic stereotypes and nationalities play large roles for the levels of acceptance of skilled migrants much the same way they affect the lives of other types of migrants. All in all, the experiences of skilled migrants from the white Western world seem very different to those subjected to negatively valued racialised understandings of their class, gender and ethnicity.

Conclusions

In this article, intersectionality has been used as a locus of analyses to explore the heterogeneity of social identities among highly skilled migrants in Finland. I have looked at how skilled migrants see themselves as a social group and also how they feel they are perceived and categorized by the Finns. Class, ethnicity and gender all intersect in a multitude of ways, creating different experiences and belongings. My research demonstrates that skilled migrants' primary social identification is class based and that they feel they share a similar lifestyle and cultural disposition. As 'foreigners' (as opposed to 'immigrants') and global citizens, they identify themselves first and foremost as skilled migrants.

However, social identities are not merely a matter of individual choice; they are also dependent on recognition and acceptance by others. Social group as an internal, chosen identification and social category as an imposed classification from the outside can often be conflictual (Jenkins 2000). Although a class-based identification is important for the skilled migrants' self-definition as a group, imposed categorizations related to ethnicity and race are felt in everyday social life out in public. This is largely due to various types of immigrant visibilities (Leinonen 2012a) that, in the context of Finland, have value judgements attached to them. I believe that racialised somatic features have more of a role to play in the everyday lives of skilled migrants in Finland than any other single categorization, not as a self-defined, chosen social identity, but rather as an imposed (negative) categorization by a more powerful Other, based on assumptions, stereotyping and visibility.

Intersectionalities are highly situational, context specific and relative to other actors. Similar to Anthias' 'translocational positionality', Okamura (1981: 456) has coined the term 'situational ethnicity', by which he refers to 'the constraints imposed upon actors within social situations as a consequence of the overall structure of ethnic group relations in a society'. Equally, other aspects of a person's social identity are also situational, relative, contextual, mutable and dependent on other actors around one: 'It may be that in some situations ethnicity is a relevant factor which influences the interaction of parties, while in other situations the relationship proceeds according to other attributes of the parties such as class, religion, occupation, sex, personality, etc.' (Okamura 1981: 454). For example, for skilled migrants, gender might be an important factor in a dating situation. However, at work, class-based parts of identity are probably the most important, and the relevance of ethnicity and gender diminish. Nationality may only become an issue in relation to immigration policies and law.

The greatest disadvantages among the skilled migrants in Finland seem to be experienced by those male skilled migrants with unfavourably viewed, visible ethnicities (i.e. black or Asian). They suffer from racism, threat of violence, in the dating market and social life in general even more than female migrants from same ethnicities, therefore making the intersection of ethnicity and gender a double disadvantage for them (against the basic assumption of feminist intersectionality that assumes ethnic women to be the most disadvantaged group). However, these different aspects of identity do not merely, deterministically, add up to form one's social destiny. Rather, going back to 'translocational positionality', we must look at 'issues of identity in terms of locations which are not fixed but are context, meaning and time related and which therefore involve shifts and contradictions' (Anthias 2008: 5). Ethnicity, gender, nationality and class (among others) are not static categories that can be analysed and placed in the field, rather they intersect and interact in the skilled migrants' lives in ways more complicated than many early intersectionality theories would suggest. Any one person may have different, even contradictory, locations with the same set of characteristics in different situations. Identity markers or any of their combinations do not carry predetermined value within themselves, rather their meanings are always dependent on the situation, surroundings, position and other actors.

I would like to continue from this to elaborate that the assumedly negative characteristics of categories of identities, such as being black or being a woman, may also in fact themselves be positive in certain circumstances. Much of intersectionality research has concentrated on the accumulative negative effects of particular identity categories, but it could also be used to point to the positive intersections of social categories. Indeed, as Jenkins (2000: 20) puts it: ‘Categorization is unavoidable in knowing the social world, and in all social identification. There is no necessary equation of categorization with stigmatization or oppression. Categorization can be positive and valorizing’. It is important to point out that examples in this article only explain relative disadvantages within a particular group that is not felt to be a disadvantaged group to be associated with. In fact, being a skilled migrant is seen as a positive group identity, as well as a positive, even valorising, categorization by others. Ethnically visible skilled migrants in my study do not have multiple disadvantages from intersecting identity markers; rather, for many, it is a question of a negative (e.g. ethnicity) and a positive (class status) classification intersecting, that *only in comparison* to white skilled migrants as the ‘migrant elite’ (Koskela 2014) seem disadvantaged. Their status in society is still higher than those lower at the ‘migrant hierarchy’ (ibid) whose ethnicity and class status are both negatively regarded. Identities start to appear conflictual when one is assumed by others not to be part of this privileged group because of gender, racialised ethnicity or any other visible categorization. These conflictual identities further affect social collectivities and sense of belonging and are hence worthy of further exploration.

Notes

1. ‘Class’ in this article is used to refer to socio-economic status that includes consideration for educational level, employment and occupational field and also ‘goes beyond this economic dimension to include cultural, political and symbolic kinds of capital’ (Fresnoza-Flot & Shinozaki 2017: 871).
2. Finnish women marry foreign men most often from UK, USA and Sweden (followed by Turkey, Russia and Germany), whereas Finnish men marry foreign women from Russia, Estonia, Thailand and the Former Soviet countries (Migration Institute, <http://www.migrationinstitute.fi/pdf/webreports2.pdf>, p.4).

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